

# River-bank project marks end of cleanup at waste site

Contaminated soil being removed from former Johns-Manville asbestos plant.

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NASHUA — The yellow sign along the Nashua River warns neighbors: Asbestos waste disposal site. Do not create dust.

Now, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has begun a project to clean up the river's banks near the newly razed Johns-Manville plant.

The asbestos plant, formerly located at 40 Bridge St., was demolished earlier this year, but EPA officials remain concerned about land closer to the river.

"Johns-Manville discharged effluent into the river," said David McIntyre, chief of site evaluation and response section for the EPA. "Asbestos did get there through a discharge pipe from the plant. It's visible on the surface of the sand."

Superfund Records Center  
SITE: Johns-Manville  
BREAK: 13.3  
OTHER: 470009

Engineers from Roy F. Weston Inc., a contractor for the EPA, gathered soil samples earlier this month from the site where the banks are encrusted with the disease-causing insulation material, said McIntyre.

The engineers are surveying the land to determine the extent — and depth — of the contamination, he said.

Once the study is complete, the EPA will then begin work with the U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers on a design to either excavate the soil or contain the contamination, McIntyre said.

"We are checking the depth to get an idea of the extent of the contamination, but, generally, you can see it," McIntyre said. "The extent of contamination survey will give us an idea how much we need to excavate."

McIntyre said the plant, which began producing asbestos in 1900 for industrial insulation products and continued until 1985, discharged the lethal material into the river in small, more dangerous amounts over time as opposed to "big pieces."

See CLEANUP, Page 11

SDMS DocID 470009



Staff photo by Peter Carvelli

Marita Dunn labels soil samples taken from the Nashua River behind the site of the former Johns-Manville asbestos plant in Nashua. Dunn works for Roy F. Weston Inc., a contractor for the Environmental Protection Agency.

## Cleanup

From Page 1

"Because it came out in small amounts and accumulated, it would be easily dispersed if not handled correctly," he said.

The Johns-Manville asbestos plant had become an eyesore and a danger to the Bridge Street neighborhood before it was demolished. State health officials deemed the manufacturing plant a health hazard two years ago. Asbestos was once a popular building material, but health studies since have shown the natural mineral can cause debilitating respiratory illness when it becomes airborne.

The land where the plant's buildings stood is now city-owned grassy, open space, EPA officials said. Field studies to determine whether that land is pollution-free are expected by the end of the month.

The characteristics of the site near the river will be further examined during the next few months before an exact plan to clean-up the river banks is determined, but at this stage of the project, excavation appears a likely outcome, McIntyre said.

If the land is excavated, the waste would be trucked to a yet-to-be-determined disposal site, he said.

"These are details that we'll have to work out," he said.

The entire clean-up, including the demolition of the plant, was scheduled in portions. Once the effluent pipe was plugged and the building leveled, the EPA moved on to the second half of the project, McIntyre said.

"When we started in on the financing, we weren't sure whether we would get enough money to get all the way through the project," he said. "We focused on getting that done first."

The EPA has received the funding for this leg of the project. But the EPA will investigate any option it can to recover the cost from the original property owners or any other related entities, he said.

"We do investigate that to look at what responsible parties there may be," he said.

The contaminated land along the river is believed to run several hundred feet long and about 50 feet wide, McIntyre said.

The river project likely will be the last leg of the Johns-Manville clean-up project.

"After we address that we are not going to do any further work in that area," he said, "because there are no other hazards we need to address."